

Questions for Professor Thompson:

What is the specific assignment for this essay?

For this paper, I asked students to reflect on a section from their textbook called “Styles of Child Rearing,” in which the author describes the seminal work of Diana Baumrind (1967). Through careful examination of the way parents interact with their children, Baumrind proposed that parents differ along three critical dimensions: acceptance and involvement, control, and autonomy granting. Baumrind sorted parents’ styles into four main categories based on their relationships with their children in these three areas.

Students were to write a short paper describing the parenting style their parent(s) used in raising them. They were to use examples, illustrations, and anecdotes from their childhood to illustrate their parent’s/parents’ behavior along each of the three dimensions.

I asked students to keep in mind that:

- The best characterization may be that their parents used a blend of two parenting styles.
- Their two parents could have had different styles.
- Perhaps major life events, like divorce and then the subsequent re-marriage of one parent (and hence the introduction of a step-parent) played a large role. The parenting styles that predominated before and after the major life event could have been different.
- Parents can shift in their use of different styles over time.
- Their own temperament played a role as well.

How does this assignment fit with the goals of your course?

Psychology 203, Introduction to Child Psychology and Human Development, is an entry-level survey course of child developmental psychology. As such, there is a lot of material to be covered, and I expect the students to learn a lot of basic information. In addition, however, I encourage students to reflect on what they are learning and apply it to their own life and background. Child psychology is such an inherently interesting and relevant subject because we all were once children, and most of us will also become parents. Research shows that adults who have processed their childhood (even if it was awful) and come to a level of understanding of their parents’ past actions and abilities, will have more securely attached children when they themselves become parents. One of my goals in this course is to encourage students to begin (or to continue) the process of understanding how they were raised, and to reflect on its impact on their current lives and relationships.

Why does this student’s essay stand out for you as strong writing?

The students in PSY 203 wrote extraordinary papers in response to this assignment. Among the very best papers, Ashley’s stood out for me, probably because I had such an

emotional reaction to it. I enjoyed the anecdotes she used to illustrate the high level of involvement her mother had in her life. Throughout the paper, Ashley allowed herself to be vulnerable by telling the truth in clear, simple language. I applaud her for her honesty, and for her courage in being willing to share this paper with the HWS community. Well done, Ashley!

Questions for Ashley Yull:

How did you go about completing this essay? What steps did you follow?

To begin this assignment, I completed the assigned reading, “Styles of Child-Rearing” from *Infants and Children* written by Laura E. Berk. I then contemplated the implications of the various parenting styles that I had been subjected to as a child and adolescent. After determining the parenting styles that my parents had used, I compiled a list of anecdotes that provided support for each of the parenting styles. Next, I created a basic format of the topics that I would address in the paper. Once I had completed these steps, I was able to complete the paper and edit it with the diligent help of Professor Thompson.

What was the most challenging aspect of this essay assignment?

I always find writing about myself to be a difficult endeavor due to its personal nature. It is also challenging to look at your own life from an exterior perspective having experienced the events first hand.

How does this essay connect to your work in the course as a whole?

Introduction to Child Psychology and Human Development is a course focusing on the normal path of child development from the prenatal period through late childhood. There are two main objectives of the course as stated in the course syllabus: the first is to lead to the development of a concrete understanding of the findings and theories in developmental psychology and the second is to grapple with the many questions that are central to one’s self concept and the life that you are leading. This essay specifically addressed the second objective by providing an opportunity for students to analyze and reflect upon their upbringing.

What is the most important thing you learned from doing this essay?

This essay helped me to gain a better understanding of my own childhood and the way it has contributed to the person I am today. In doing so, it has allowed me to take a more in depth look at the implications of how I was raised as well as how I plan to raise my own children in the future.